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Subject: Bloomberg News Service (3-16) EPA Clears Water in Pennsylvania Fracking Town After Complaints

EPA Clears Water in Pennsylvania Fracking Town After Complaints

By Mark Drajem on March 16, 2012

The water in 11 wells near Dimock, Pennsylvania, is safe, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said, disappointing residents and health groups who say the federal government should intervene in a dispute with Cabot Oil & Gas Corp. (COG)

In a statement released late yesterday, the EPA said its tests begun early this year found sodium, methane, chromium or bacteria, but at levels “within the safe range.” Two wells were found to have elevated levels of arsenic, and the agency will do a second round of tests of those homes.

“If they say it’s safe to drink, I want to see them come drink the water from my well,” Craig Sautner, a local resident who is part of a lawsuit against Cabot, said in an interview. Sautner said his water is cloudy, and when he draws from his well he can hear gas gurgling in.

Residents in Dimock complained that hydraulic fracturing operations, or fracking, by Cabot near their homes had put methane in their water and endangered their health. Fracking is a process that injects water, sand and chemicals into deep shale formations to free trapped natural gas.

The residents’ plight gained wider attention late last year after Cabot cut off water deliveries and activists such as the actor Mark Ruffalo traveled to the town to make their own deliveries.

Cabot said its tests of the water in the area last year turned up no signs of contaminants beyond legal limits.

Meeting Standards

“We are pleased that data released by EPA today on sampling of water in Dimock confirmed earlier findings that Dimock drinking water meets all regulatory standards,” the company said in an e-mail yesterday.

A boom in gas production using hydraulic fracturing helped increase gas supplies, cutting prices 32

percent last year while raising environmental concerns about tainted drinking water. The EPA is studying the effects of fracking on water and weighing a series of nationwide regulations.

Dimock has been a test case for the agency as it interjected itself after state officials had settled with Cabot and allowed water deliveries to cease. The EPA initially pledged to send water to the town, and then reversed itself. A few days later it changed course again and said it would give water to a few households, and those deliveries will continue.

Groups such as the Sierra Club said they were disappointed in the EPA's announcement yesterday.

"EPA should be increasing the alarm about arsenic showing up at elevated levels near gas drilling," Iris Marie Bloom, the head of Protecting Our Waters, an anti-fracking group in Philadelphia, said in an e-mail. "I would not want to be drinking arsenic, and neither would you."

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